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ABSTRACT

To compete with other professions for the most able people, teaching needs a career ladder system for elementary and secondary teachers comparable to the peer review model offered in higher education. Such a system should consist of three levels. Following the initial, probationary position on the career ladder, that of beginning instructor, the majority of teachers would be appointed to the rank of professional teacher. The final step of the career ladder, that of master teacher, should command a significantly higher salary than that of the professional teacher and be accessible to a significant number of teachers. Master teacher positions should be announced like administrative positions; appointments should be made proportionately at the K-3, 4-6, junior high or middle school, and high school levels by a career ladder review panel composed of respected teachers, administrators, and others appointed by the superintendent. State legislators should appropriate funds specifically to the career ladder/master teacher program to help ensure its success. Career ladder review panels should be established as quickly as possible to respond to laws currently being enacted. These panels should involve teachers extensively both in the establishment of criteria for selecting master teachers and in the process of selection itself. (JBM)

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

THE SECRETARY

The Peer Review Model for Managing a Career Ladder/Master Teacher/Performance Pay Program for Elementary and Secondary Schools

An Essay by T. H. Bell

U.S. Secretary of Education

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The Need

To attain excellence in education we must attract and hold the best possible talent in teaching. Teaching competes with other important professions for the most able people. In recognizing this, the National Commission on Excellence in Education urged that "Salaries for the teaching profession should be increased and should be professionally competitive, market-sensitive, and performance based." The recommendations elaborated further with the following statements, "School boards, administrators, and teachers should cooperate to develop career ladders for teachers that distinguish among the beginning instructor, the experienced teacher, and the master teacher."

Teachers deserve to have opportunities to apply for and receive promotions. Most of the advancement opportunities currently offered in education require successful candidates to leave teaching and move into management. This is a very serious limitation in the potential of teaching. The lack of a career ladder in elementary and secondary education has made teaching less attractive and less competitive for top talent as compared to higher education. With those limitations, and with

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the restrictions in salary potential mandated by only one salary schedule for all teachers in a particular school system, elementary and secondary teaching has been placed in a situation that makes it almost impossible to compete in the human talent market place.

Teachers' organizations and some teachers have resisted change in this situation because they are not convinced that an objective and equitable decision making system can be established. They want a major voice in th design and administration of any career ladder program.

The higher education career ladder system that offers opportunities for a professor to gain recognition and advancement to senior rank as an academic professional may provide some of the elements of a model for elementary and secondary schools. If universal acceptance of academic rank under a peer review system of evaluation of performance is a measure of success, the higher education model has been rewardingly successful. It is difficult to find a four year college or university that does not have such a system in place and many two year colleges also have a similar career ladder system.

Based upon my own knowledge of how the academic rank system functions in higher education, and based upon my experience in elementary and secondary education, following is a suggested peer review model for managing a career ladder/master teacher/performance pay program for elementary and secondary schools.

Creation of New Positions

The board of education should establish not less than three steps on a career ladder for teachers. During a probationary period (usually not less than three years) a teacher new to the profession should hold the rank of beginning instructor. Following satisfactory completion of the probationary period and after comprehensive evaluation of the new teacher's performance the beginning instructor should be advanced in rank to the position of professional teacher. Only those teachers whose performance has been fully satisfactory should be advanced to the second step in the career ladder. Advancement should not be automatic and candidates should not be moved to the second step if they have not shown promise for growth and improvement over time. Some beginning instructors may require an additional year, or even an additional two years of probationary status. If, after two years beyond the normal beginning instructor status, a teacher has not proven to be fully satisfactory in performance, the probationary teacher should be dismissed. While the purpose is to help a teacher succeed in his or her quest for advancement to the second step in the career ladder, the prime purpose of the beginning instructor rank is to promote growth and development of new teachers of promise and to eliminate from the profession those whose continuation in teaching would not be in the best interest of the hundreds of students who would be receiving instruction from one of marginal competence.

The Professional Teacher

Most of the teachers in a school system will occupy the rank of professional teacher. These will be the experienced professionals who have proven their competence over the years of their service.

In an initial action of the board of education to establish academic rank for the faculty of the school system, all teachers with less than three years of experience and all teachers on probationary status would be appointed by the board of education to the rank of beginning instructor. All other teachers in the school system would be appointed to the rank of professional teacher.

Some teachers have been assigned special duties such as Department head, chairperson of a committee, or some other special responsibility. Such appointments should remain in place. Academic rank should not be confused with special duties, responsibilities and assignments currently extant in the school system.

As teachers move up the career ladder to the rank of professional teacher, significant salary recognition should be provided by the board of education to the extent possible under stringent budgets.

The Master Teacher

A new position, Master Teacher, should be created by action of the board of education. This position should be recognized as the third step of a career ladder system. The position should be established as one of prestige that commands a significantly higher salary than the professional teacher step. In order to make the salary potential in the upper ranges of teaching competitive with other professions, the master teacher's salary must be set by the board after careful review of other salary ranges. The intent should be to keep academically able and talented teachers in the classroom. Comparisons with administrative salaries should also be made to ensure that this goal is attained.

The criteria for attaining promotion to the position of master teacher should be based upon distinguished teaching performance. This will require the school system's most able teachers, instructional supervisors, and principals to work cooperatively on a task force to describe what is meant by outstanding teacher performance.

Standards should be sufficiently high to command the respect and prestige necesary to make attainment of this position a goal to be pursued by most teachers. The standards should also be realistic and attainable for a significant number of teachers. In higher education, for example, approximately 20% of the professors hold the rank of full professor. This high academic rank on the college campus is clearly attainable. At the same time, the position is sufficiently exclusive to make it an attractive objective for the academic professional.

Master Teachers should be recognized and rewarded for excellence in teaching. They should be encouraged to teach, and their duties should not be re-directed to detract from teaching as their prime responsibility. Working with other teachers, helping in curriculum work, accepting college student teacher trainees by master teachers will all help to advance the cause of excellence in education. But to keep master teachers in the classroom, these additional duties must be carefully limited. We don't want to identify our best teachers and then take them away from teaching. (This is what happens when our best teachers are promoted to the position of principal.)

How to Select Master Teachers

Distinguished teaching performance is difficult to measure. Additionally, there will be many excellent teachers aspiring to be promoted to the rank of master teacher. As is the situation in higher education, there will be more worthy applicants than there will be positions available. The evaluation and decision making process must be as objective, fair, and free from favoritism and political influence as possible.

The new position of master teacher should be filled by posting an announcement of the opening and inviting applications. The selection process should be somewhat similar to that followed in filling administrative positions in a school system that is committed to equal employment opportunity procedures. When a new opening occurs as a

principal, assistant principal, supervisor, department chair, or other job opportunity the school system usually announces the vacancies describes the qualifications, calls for applications, receives the competitors' complete application files including all possible evidence of the qualifications of the applicants. After all candidates have had a chance to apply and to build a file that supports their applications, a selection committee or panel meets to review and recommend the succesful candidate to the superintendent and the board of education. This selection of administrators is a difficult decision making process, but it is one that goes on every year in most school systems.

The procedure for selecting master teachers should be patterned after the process described above. The qualifications and selection criteria should be carefully developed through a participatory process that invclves teachers, administrators and other professionally competent persons. The job opening for master teacher should then be announced, and applications should be invited.

In order to assure a balance of master teacher openings throughout the school system, the board of education should establish a career ladder review panel for the four traditional levels of elementary and secondary education: primary grades (k-3), intermediate grades (4-6), junior high or middle school (7-9 or 7-8 or some other grade level pattern), and senior high school. (In secondary school levels a series of subcommittees of the career ladder review panel comprised of expertise by subject area speciality may be desirable.) The board should also determine the number of master teacher positions to be filled at each level.

The duties of the review panel should be quite similar to those of a screening committee that helps in the selection of new administrators. They should evaluate the application folders of the candidates for the position. In this evaluation, they will review all the evidence substantiating the performance of al the candidates and, through use of the combined, disciplined professional judgement of the total panel members, make recommendations to the superintendent of schools and the board.

The career ladder review panel should be appointed by the board of education from a list of nominees provided by the superintendent after consultation with teachers, administrators and other leaders in the school system and the community. The panel should have ample representation from teachers who are well informed and respected for their competence and good judgment. Other groups including principals, subject area supervisors, specialists, and parents should also be considered for membership.

Panel members should, of course, avoid conflict of interest situations. It may be necessary from time to time for a panel member to be excused from participation in order to avoid any hint of favoritism or conflict of interest.

Legislative Encouragement

State legislatures have a unique opportunity to play a significant role in the strengthening of the teaching profession. Funds for the basic salary schedule should be provided to make teachers' salaries as competitive as possible within the limits of available tax dollars.

A separate appropriation item to fund the career ladder/master teacher program will provide an incentive to school boards. If funds from this special appropriation are available only to school systems that act to establish a performance based, career ladder salary structure above and beyond the basic salary schedule, school boards will be in a stronger position to persuade teachers to support the necessary change. On the other hand, if funds must come from revenues that would otherwise be available for across-the-board salary increases, the argument to maintain the status quo will be more persuasive.

Legislatures should use this appropriation carrot to provide the needed incentive.

Summary and Conclusions

The success of initial efforts to establish a career ladder/master teacher system for the nation's elementary and secondary schools will be contingent on the decisions made by school boards to implement the new initiatives being passed by state legislatures. This opportunity to make the right moves while there is public support should not be lost.

The model described in this paper is not intended to try to prescribe for school systems a single approach to this challenging problem. It is, rather, an attempt to outline a procedure that is an adaptation of the academic rank/peer review system now extant in higher education. Additionally, it is patterned after the process followed in many school systems to fill administrative jobs.

Some critics of an academic rank system for elementary and secondary education claim that parents will object to having their children taught by none other than a person who holds the rank of master teacher. The higher education experience does not substantiate this complaint. Few of us during our college years were prone to complain that we were being taught by an assistant professor. We wanted competent instruction, and we often found it in the ranks of junior level professors who were working hard to prove themselves ready for advancement.

The system of peer review is obviously not perfect. Mistakes are made by review panels. A few incompetent full professors are still found on college campuses to prove this point. But the system works and works well or it would have been abandoned years ago. Higher education has gained the advantage of offering opportunities for promotion in academe. These advantages are urgently needed in the elementary and secondary school teaching ranks if we are to revitalize the profession. Elaborate efforts to build a teacher effectiveness measurement system will be difficult to establish within the short time frame available to educators. As we become more sophisticated in measurement and evaluation of teacher performance, we will still face the interpretation and decision making process. This is best done with the participation of teachers and other interested and professionally competent persons sharing their best knowledge. We need to establish these panels now, for they will soon be needed. Laws are being enacted that mandate immediate action in several states.

The model proposed relies on the disciplined professional judgment of a panel whose membership contains knowledgeable peers currently working in the classrooms. The model invites each candidate for advancement in rank to present a file that will give the best available evidence of outstanding teaching performance. From the list of candidates, the review panel recommends those whom panel members collectively consider the most deserving of promotion. This approach is similar to that method used to select candidates to fill other positions of responsibility in our schools. It is also patterned after the system used in higher education. Its administrative simplicity and its similarity to other procedures are its strongest points.

Over time, a career ladder system will become more widely accepted in our schools if we involve teachers extensively in the process of developing the criteria and in the actual decision making procedure once the criteria are established. These first years will be crucial. The public wants a change in our method of compensation and promotion of our teachers. Our success in meeting this need will result in an improved teaching profession and more public support of education.

It is hoped that this model will make a contribution to solving one of our most urgent problems, the building of a truly great teaching profession. Constructive criticism and suggestions for improvement are invited. Other models also need to be developed. Hopefully, this attempt to describe one approach will lead to others that will be equally or even more promising. It is not presented as a panacea but as one model worthy of consideration, criticism, and further refinement and improvement.

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